

greatest story-tellers of a great literary epoch, all made use of murder to obtain some of their most moving as well as their most awesome effects. Nearer our own time, Dickens again and again was fascinated by the possibilities which murder offers to the creative artist. With one exception, to my mind the most remarkable murder in fiction is that of Montague Tigg by Jonas Chuzzlewit, in which we also have that strange, powerful, almost Freudian, analysis of the murderer's mind after he has committed his crime. Yet another remarkable study in murder is the murder of Tullingham in "Bleak House." There Dickens may be accused of trying his hand at a "mystery story," for the reader is led to believe that Lady Deadlock committed the crime, whereas the real criminal was her French maid. Who murdered Edwin Drood still excites controversy among all intelligent crime "fans" as well as among Dickensians.



Of the great Russian writers, the master analyst of human nature, Dostoevsky, chose deliberately the most sordid and commonplace type of murder in his "Crime and Punishment." Raskolnikov murders a poor old woman, Alena Ivanovna, simply for her money. What makes the novel one of the stories of the world is the picture of remorse and fear which follow the commission of the crime; the analysis of the sentiments which lead Raskolnikov to make his dramatic confession, and the unforgettable moving picture of his spiritual resurrection in Siberia.

Of the murder mystery pure and simple it may be doubted if there will ever be written a story to rival Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." The very name of the street, invented by the writer, is a stroke of genius, and unconsciously prepares the reader for a tale of terror. I am reminded, by the very thought of the Rue Morgue, of what is to my thinking by far the most remarkable, as it is also by far the shortest, of Zola's novels—"Thérèse Raquin."

As the reader of that terrible study of human nature will remember, it is not the murder itself, so much as the fearful horror and remorse induced by their wicked act which makes the picture of the once guilty lovers, now a respectable married couple, so unforgettable. The effect is heightened, to an immeasurable degree, by the portrayal of the murdered man's paralyzed mother who knows all, and cannot reveal her knowledge. "Thérèse Raquin" proves that the story of a common as well as a sordid crime, committed by a very ordinary pair of criminals, can be transmuted into a great work of art by the writer's sheer creative gift.



With the exception of Dickens, those Eminent Victorians who were also creative artists, rarely, if ever, used murder as a theme. Thackeray's one attempt was his one failure. Trollope was too great a student of the human heart entirely to exclude murder, but he never turned his analytic gift to the portrayal of an intelligent murderer.

There was, however, one exception, and a very striking exception, to this rule, as I am sure all those who have had the good fortune to read the book in question will agree. In the middle of the last century a delicate, refined Englishwoman wrote a most striking story called "Paul Ferrol." "Paul Ferrol" was probably the first murder-mystery story ever written in the English language! So great was its success, and so profound the impression produced by the novel, that the writer followed it with a successful sequel called by the clever title "Why Paul Ferrol Killed His Wife."

Later in the century Wilkie Collins and Miss Braddon both reveled in murder. Indeed we may regard them as the parents of that vast, unruly brood which may be described under the generic family name of crime stories. But there was an interval of many years between the period which saw their best work, and the great blossoming which, beginning in the late nineties, is now in full flower.

In my opinion, the most subtle, best contrived, and best described murder in modern fiction, is that to be found in a novel written by Oliver Onions, entitled "According to the Evidence." In this remarkable story Mr. Onions has described a quite ordinary young man who, impelled by a sense of righteous anger, and to save the woman he loves from a terrible and sordid fate, commits murder in such a fashion that there is not the slightest fear that he will even be suspected, far less actually proved, to have committed the crime.

The modern mystery writer gives far too much thought, or so it seems to me, to the question as to who committed the murder he has been at pains to describe. A common formula is to start with a dead body, and then invent various clues which have for object that of putting the reader on the wrong scent as to the real identity of the murderer. The success of many of these stories proves the existence of a vast public to whom the mystery element in a story means everything. Such readers do not care why a man was murdered, what they long to know is who murdered him.

What has always seemed to me, both as reader and writer, of paramount interest in either a true, or an invented, story of murder, is contained not in the word "Who?", but in the word "Why?". This probably is why I consider "The American Tragedy" one of the great books written in my time. Theodore Dreiser digs deep among the roots of our poor human nature and so enables the reader to see why his unhappy hero committed, if not an actual murder, then (what, in a spiritual sense, is all that matters) many times murder in his heart. You are also shown in this remarkable study of humanity what few even of the greatest writers have thought worth while the doing—the effect created by a murder, or a supposed murder, on a large number of other human beings.

## Poor Scotland Yard!

FALSE FACE. By SYDNEY HORLER. New York: George H. Doran Company. 1926. \$2.

THE BENSON MURDER CASE. By S. S. VAN DINE. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1926. \$2.

THE MALARET MYSTERY. By OLGA HARTLEY. Boston: Small, Maynard & Company. 1926. \$2.

SEA FOG. By J. S. FLETCHER. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1926. \$2.

THE MASSINGHAM BUTTERFLY. J. S. FLETCHER. Boston: Small, Maynard & Company. 1926. \$2.

Reviewed by DASHIELL HAMMETT

IN some years of working for private detective agencies in various cities I came across only one fellow sleuth who would confess that he read detective stories. "I eat 'em up," this one said without shame. "When I'm through my day's gum-shoeing I like to relax; I like to get my mind on something that's altogether different from the daily grind; so I read detective stories."

He would have liked "False Faces;" it is different from any imaginable sort of day's work. Scotland Yard promises to "safeguard the safety" (page 29, if you think I spoof) of an American inventive genius who has business with the British government. Arrayed against him and it is a medley of scoundrels—a "shuddersome" Communist with "a smile that revolted," a hyphenated "brute-beast" of a German, a Russian Baron who has "the air of a world cosmopolitan," and so on, including a nameless skeptic who doubts that a certain blueprint is an original drawing. Everybody moves around a good deal, using trains, motorcycles, automobiles, airplanes, submarines, secret passages, sewers, and suspended ropes. Most of the activity seems purposeless, but in the end dear old England is saved once more from the Bolsheviks.

I don't think it will stay saved unless something is done to Scotland Yard. It is, if this evidence is to be believed, a scandalously rattle-brained organization: trivialities are carefully guarded while grave secrets are given out freely: no member ever knows what his coworkers are up to. But we aren't in a position to criticize our cousins: here in the same book is an American Secret Service operative occupied with stolen necklaces and red plots, when he should be home guarding presidents, or chasing counterfeiters, or performing some of the other duties of his department, and in "The Benson Murder Case" the New York police and district attorney are not a bit less haphazard.

Alvin Benson is found sitting in a wicker chair in his living room, a book still in his hand, his legs crossed, and his body comfortably relaxed in a life-like position. He is dead. A bullet from an Army model Colt .45 automatic pistol, held some six feet away when the trigger was pulled, has passed completely through his head. That his position should have been so slightly disturbed by the impact of such a bullet at such a range is preposterous, but

the phenomenon hasn't anything to do with the plot, so don't, as I did, waste time trying to figure it out. The murderer's identity becomes obvious quite early in the story. The authorities, no matter how stupid the author chose to make them, would have cleared up the mystery promptly if they had been allowed to follow the most rudimentary police routine. But then what would there have been for the gifted Vance to do?



This Philo Vance is in the Sherlock Holmes tradition and his conversational manner is that of a high-school girl who has been studying the foreign words and phrases in the back of her dictionary. He is a bore when he discusses art and philosophy, but when he switches to criminal psychology he is delightful. There is a theory that any one who talks enough on any subject must, if only by chance, finally say something not altogether incorrect. Vance disproves this theory: he manages always, and usually ridiculously, to be wrong. His exposition of the technique employed by a gentleman shooting another gentleman who sits six feet in front of him deserves a place in a *How to be a detective by mail* course.

To supply this genius with a field for his operations the author has to treat his policemen abominably. He doesn't let them ask any questions that aren't wholly irrelevant. They can't make inquiries of anyone who might know anything. They aren't permitted to take any steps toward learning whether the dead man was robbed. Their fingerprint experts are excluded from the scene of the crime. When information concerning a mysterious box of jewelry accidentally bobs up everybody resolutely ignores it, since it would have led to a solution before the three-hundredth page.

Mr. Van Dine doesn't deprive his officials of every liberty, however: he generously lets them compete with Vance now and then in the expression of idiocies. Thus Heath, a police detective-sergeant, says that any pistol of less than .44 calibre is too small to stop a man, and the district attorney, Markham, displays an amazed disinclination to admit that a confession could actually be false. This Markham is an outrageously naïve person: the most credible statement in the tale is to the effect that Markham served only one term in this office. The book is written in the little-did-he-realize style.



"The Malaret Mystery" has to do with a death in Morocco. The reader is kept in rural England and the clues are brought to him through two or three or more hands. The result is a tiresomely slow and rambling story altogether without suspense, but this method does keep the solution concealed until the very last from those readers who have forgotten the plot, which is an old friend in not very new clothes. The motivation, if you are interested in that sort of thing, is pretty dizzy.

"Sea Fog," in spite of its rather free use of happenstance, is by far the best of this group. To the coast of Sussex comes a boy bound for the sea. In a deserted mill he spies on Kest and his map, in the morning fog he sees Kest killed, in the days that follow he sees more dead men. If toward the end these dead men turn up with almost mechanical regularity, Mr. Fletcher's skill keeps it from being too monotonous a process. But even that skill doesn't quite suffice to make the forced ending plausible. Poor old Scotland Yard is put up to silly tricks again. However, "Sea Fog" offers more than two hundred decidedly interesting pages.

Most of the fifteen stories in "The Massingham Butterfly" deal with crime in its milder forms. They are all mild stories, some of them obviously written long ago. There is no especial reason for anyone's reading them.

## The Age of Confession

(Continued from preceding page)

and whatever can throw light on either becomes to him of importance. Where better can he gain insight into the springs and controls of action than in those ungarnished confessions which set forth the weaknesses, the aimlessnesses, and the shortcomings of character along with its resolve and strength?

The more intimately autobiography reveals the gropings of personality the more completely it compensates for the conformity of his own life. Of the standardization of the day is born an interest in the unique.



## Face-Painter and Feminist

GILBERT STUART. An Illustrated Descriptive List of His Works Compiled by LAWRENCE PARK, in four volumes, in folio. New York: William Edwin Rudge. 1926. \$100.

Reviewed by FRANK JEWETT MATHER  
Princeton University

THE late Lawrence Park, best connoisseur of early American portraiture of our time, devoted the last ten years of his too short life to the compilation of this monumental catalogue. He left it on loose cards and not quite complete. The devotion of friends supporting the exceptional editorial labors of William Sawitzky has perpetuated Park's endeavor in these four stately volumes. The circumstances of their production have involved certain drawbacks. It has been necessary to include a few doubtful Stuarts which Park had provisionally accepted. Additions had to be made. These are duly initialled by the editors, William Sawitzky and Theodore Bolton. In general these inevitable blemishes and inequalities of judgment are negligible. The task is very fully achieved.

\*\*\*

The cataloguing is alphabetical by sitters, with the fullest genealogical information and record of ownership. This catalogue, with 948 numbers, and in addition 111 devoted to Washington, besides alphabetical lists of past and present owners, occupies two volumes. The two remaining volumes present 606 large halftone cuts of excellent quality exemplifying every phase of the master. Again the arrangement is by sitters, alphabetically. No reader of critical bent can turn over these illustrations without longing to reshuffle them into chronological order. In short, the arrangement, while ideal for the owner, collector, and dealer, is tantalizing to the critic, who after all is the minority party among the interested. Excellent introductions by John Hill Morgan, Royal Cortissoz, and Theodore Bolton, do something for this minority, but not quite enough. Mr. Hill's biographical sketch generally vindicates the accuracy and justness of Dr. Waterhouse's estimate as against the sentimentalisms of Dunlap and the apologetics of Jane Stuart. Mr. Hill has also unearthed the interesting new fact that Stuart cast himself upon Benjamin West's compassion late in 1776 or early in 1777, about a year earlier than had been supposed. This bears out Trumbull's statement, which had been discredited.

An excellent painter, Stuart was far from an exemplary character. He was capable of neglecting attached parents, of ridiculing a benefactor, of accepting advances for portraits which he never painted and possibly never intended to paint. His return to America, far from being a patriotic pilgrimage to the feet of Washington, as Dunlap represents it, was an incursion into an unspoiled field of patronage, London, and Dublin having become too hot for the artist adventurer. All this may seem unimportant, but I think not. A face-painter with fewer foibles of his own would not have caught with Stuart's uncanny insight the foibles of others, while an almost illiterate colonial youth of low degree would hardly have made himself a favorite in the best society of Dr. Johnson's London if he had offered as qualification simply a steady and dependable character. Instead Gilbert Stuart offered an extraordinary tact and wit and a competent mastery of his craft. It was enough wherever he turned.

\*\*\*

For some weeks I have been turning over the plates in Mr. Park's book with the result that one old impression has been confirmed, and an entirely new impression has been gained. I remain of the opinion that while Gilbert Stuart was not quite a great portrait painter, he was one of the greatest of face-painters, while I realize for the first time that Stuart was perhaps the ablest interpreter of womanhood that the art of painting has seen. Intending nothing derogatory by the term, I feel that the word face-painter precisely defines Stuart's notable excellences and his equally patent limitations. Within his lifetime worked Reynolds, Gainsborough, Raeburn, Goya, David, and Ingres. None of them painted a face better than Stuart, and several of them painted it less well, but all of them have a stronger claim to be regarded as great portraitists. Stuart's interest was usually exhausted

with capturing the forms and character of a face. He was a specialist, and contentedly so. There was an early moment when under the influence of Gainsborough he aimed at style. Later he cared only for likeness and character. His compositions are the entirely adequate improvisations of a very clever person. His accessories and costumes are brilliantly touched in, but they remain extraneous to the pictorial effect. And this neglect was from choice and not from lack of ability. The costumes and accessories in the portraits of Don Josef de Jaudenes y Nebot and his wife, in the Metropolitan Museum, are of exquisite fitness and character. Stuart could paint hands beautifully, but usually avoided the task, and often painted them badly. Except for the very picturesque A Gentleman Skating, William Grant, of Congalton, a canvas emulative of Gainsborough, Stuart's rare full-lengths are tritely composed. Again, unlike all his portrait-painting contemporaries, Stuart was never tempted away from his specialty. But the great portrait painter is normally a great painter who incidentally makes portraits.

Indeed it is doubtful if the man who paints only portraits will ever paint great portraits. Stuart painted hundreds of amazingly true and vivid masks—the Vaughan Washington, the Mrs. Perez Morton are types, but did he ever paint a portrait that would hang comfortably beside a Titian, a Van Dyck, a Goya, a David, or an Ingres? Which only means that Stuart could or would not provide that surplus beyond fine face-painting, that sustained pictorial richness and character, which the finest portrait painting demands. In Titian's "Ariosto" the quilted satin sleeve is as eloquent as the sensitive olive face and the silky raven beard. Rembrandt's "Lady with a Fan" would without the exquisitely



Elizabeth Mackintyre

Illustration from "About Artists," by Anice Page Cooper (Doubleday, Page).

painted fan lose half her existence. It is doubtful if these extensions of meaning, this animism in the inanimate, can be learned solely in portrait painting. At least Stuart never did learn this magic, and his place, a very honorable one, is rather with the Moros, Mierevelts, and Knellers than with the Holbeins, Velasquezes, and Hogarths.

Again a scrutiny of Park's fine albums produces the disconcerting surprise that the male portraits which Stuart made in his eighteen British years are as a class far superior to those which he painted in America, and withal that one could form from his entire work a group of women's portraits which for character and vitality have been surpassed by no painter except Rembrandt. In order that the reader may check these bald assertions, let me propose a game with him. I will make a group of a dozen British male portraits by Stuart, challenging the reader to make a group of male Americans by Stuart that shall be equal in character and pictorial beauty. Throughout the British group will show with an equally vivid character a finer and more studied pictorialism. Here is the British group; it may readily be considered in Park's illustrations: Sir Copley Ashley-Cooper, James Boydell, William Kerin Constable, Dr. John Fothergill, James Heath, Ozias Humphrey, Dr. William Smith, Gilbert Stuart, Thomas Baron Sydney, James Ward, Benjamin West, Edmond Sexton, Viscount Pery. If the reader loses in this game, as I am confident he

will, I must further remark, that with a few exceptions, the finest male portraits that Stuart painted after his return to America are those of foreigners—notably Don Josef de Jaudenes y Nebot, Count Volney, the Marquis d'Yrujo. These are all finer pictorially than most of the American male portraits, and expressed with a more complete sympathy.

Let us play the second hand of the game. I will choose a list of a dozen American female portraits which for sheer vitality and vivid personal presence will bear comparison with any dozen female portraits by any painter whatsoever—Rembrandt only barred. The list is: Mrs. William Bingham, Miss Maria Bartlett, Miss Clementina Beach, Mrs. John Bullus, Mrs. Samuel Cary, Mrs. Henry Clymer, Mrs. Charles Dearborn, Mrs. James Greenleaf, Miss Elizabeth Inches, Mrs. Perez Morton (the sketch), Mrs. Edward Tuckerman, the Marchioness d'Yrujo (née Maria McKean). The substitution of an English portrait or two, such as that of the Marchioness of Dufferin, would enrich the list. Now I am perfectly aware that from many painters could be chosen a dozen female portraits of finer pictorial accomplishment, but I doubt if any other dozen save Rembrandt's would yield so many keen and irresistible impressions of so many actual women. Merely turning over the relatively unspeaking reproductions there comes over me the old pathos of Francois Villon's deathless ballade—the deep pity that so much charm, character, and warm life is now but scattered bones, white as the snows of yesteryear, and a handful of brown dust.

\*\*\*

I feel the reader will find not only that my list will bear the proposed hard test, but that two or three alternative lists could be chosen that would meet the test as well. If this be so, my initial assertion that Stuart is the greatest painter of woman's character stands, and we gain the further point of view that when Stuart painted women the usually clear line between fine portraiture and consummate face painting tends to disappear.

We may attempt to interpret these facts in terms of Gilbert Stuart's life and character. Returning at forty to the native land which he had willingly left at her moment of greatest need, Stuart really returned as a distinguished foreigner, with a foreigner's attitude. For that robust and varied man's world of which he had been a large part in the London of Dr. Johnson, Reynolds, and Pitt, Stuart found no equivalent in New York, Philadelphia, or Boston. His homesickness he was too tactful to reveal, though it appears plainly enough in his anecdotalism, and he assuaged it by wit and work. To the American man he gave what the American man wanted, a most resolute and ressemblant face-painting. The value of this work as record has been acclaimed from the first and needs no further eulogy. But he rarely found in any American man that challenging charm which graces nearly all the portraits of his London patrons and familiars. In part this may have rested on simple inattention. There could hardly have been a more interesting male anywhere at the moment than Aaron Burr, yet Stuart painted a dull and perfunctory portrait of him. This is merely the extreme case of Stuart's always fine face-painting falling short of fine portraiture.

\*\*\*

Towards the American woman Gilbert Stuart's attitude was that of all perceptive foreigners. She was a marvel, a puzzle, and a delight. She was herself, an independent and unconditioned existence, in a sense that the American man busied with nation making could not be. So Stuart read her, confessed her, and most gallantly celebrated her, with the result that the mothers and daughters of the Republic are today about twice as alive as the fathers. And Stuart's admirable face-painting of women is ever tending to be much more than face-painting, going over the line towards fine portraiture. How Gilbert Stuart learned his magic as a feminist is between himself, Mrs. Stuart, and his God. It is enough to ascertain the fact without seeking an explanation.

I should be glad if these interpretations of an artist who through official and patriotic eminence has nearly evaporated as a man should be considered my homage to the late Lawrence Park's long labor of love upon which this and all subsequent interpretations of Gilbert Stuart must chiefly depend.